

Too much still¹ by Jen Webb

The music on the radio is full of emptiness and you sing into its spaces,
words from past disasters:

*you never know
what you need
until you need it.*

I know what I need. Till the grocer phones, says they're a bit short—
can I wait; till the receptionist phones, says the doctor's not well—can
I wait?

I can wait.

The buses have stopped and the newspapers have stopped and the cafés
are closed and the schools. We are filling their spaces with any damn
thing that fits.

This is the price we pay for the future, you say. I balance the books,
testing your premise, but we come up short. Like the scientist who says,
grieving, that the river she was testing is gone, the nurse whose hands
are broken, the nurse who can't catch his breath, the look on your face
when your father calls.

It's our keep-fit time, the hour we spend outside, and you opt out, *just
for today* you say, and I leave you stretched on the sofa, glass of wine
to hand, radio playing music that is mostly light. I put on my shoes,
open the door, promise I'll be back.

¹ Title taken from a composition by Keith Kenniff [Goldmund], on the album *Sometimes*
(Austin TX: Western Vinyl, 2015)

Going Melancholia¹ by Jen Webb
(for CW)

On the last day we thought it right to start with prayer but since we knew no prayers we sat in silence till someone said *I wish* and another *if only* and the third said *sociologically, that is what humans always say in times of crisis*.

I get it, okay? Last night I dreamt a doctor palpated my pelvis then asked how I feel about being dead. Corinne says: “Let’s all get together anyway, and go all melancholia. Like the movie.” A complicated plot; the immanence of death. And yes we will all die. But maybe not tomorrow. Maybe not like this.

Today I plucked my brows and stripped the hair from my legs, preparing as for a party, as though nothing has changed as though I am still built of light as though there still will be tomorrow, and tomorrow, and repeat. The ghost of last season’s style has caught on again, and you my future and I will act as though we too fit together across time, discounting the news, stepping out to dance.

¹ Lars von Trier’s 2011 movie *Melancholia* is about a wedding party held in the shadow of the end of the world.

Bio: Jen Webb is Distinguished Professor of Creative Practice at the University of Canberra, and Co-Editor of *Axon: Creative Explorations* and the literary journal *Meniscus*. Her most recent poetry collection is *Moving Targets* (Recent Work Press, 2018), and *Flight Mode* (co-written with Shé Hawke) will be launched in October this year.